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ABSTRACT

The history of librarianship in Ghana began in 1944 when Miss Fegan, an experienced librarian, was assigned by the British Council to run a training course for library assistants at the Achimota College Library. The subsequent development of libraries, library schools, and librarianship in Ghana is traced. To become a professional librarian in Ghana today requires the completion of a diploma course which is open only to university graduates judged to have the requisite qualities of mind, personality and temperament to make satisfactory librarians. The course consists of two parts: (1) one academic session, ending with five written examination papers and (2) the completion of a written bibliography or thesis and practical experience in an approved library. The subjects covered in the syllabus are: (1) cataloging and classification, (2) bibliography, (3) history of libraries and librarianship and (4) administration. (Author/NH)

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L I B R A R I A N S F O R G H A N A

a lecture by

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LIBRARIANS FOR GHANA

MY LECTURE tonight is one of a series of public lectures in the Faculty of Social Studies. Each lecture is intended to inform the public on the work of a particular department and to indicate how it is related to the social needs of Ghana.

For a department like mine - the Department of Library Studies, the answer is relatively straight-forward because we are so directly involved. We teach professional courses which are designed to meet immediate practical social needs, in our case the needs of the library profession. In the words of my title our purpose is to produce 'librarians for Ghana!'

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

The lecture oould hardly be given at a more appropriate time. It was twenty-five years ago this week that the first step in West Africa was taken towards this end. The history of librarianship in Ghana, and indeed in West Africa, may be said to have begun in March 1944 with the arrival of Miss Pegan, an experienced librarian, assigned by the British Council to run a training course for library assistants at Achimota.[1]

Before that time this part of Africa had no librarians. The nearest approach to a library, in the strict sense of a collection of books organized for the service of readers, was the Achimota College Library. It was in that library that

Miss Fegan settled down to her task. World War II was still in progress and it is an interesting reflection that Britain, with her resources, human and material, stretched almost to breaking point, should choose this moment for the development of a new profession in her West African colonies.

In the event Miss Fegan's training course lasted for one year only and produced a mere handful of library assistants at a sub-professional level. Her other proposals became more permanently effective and resulted within a few years in the establishment of public library services in Ghana, Nigeria and later Sierra Leone.

LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT

Since that time the development of libraries not only in West Africa but throughout the world has advanced at a continually increasing pace. The world has been experiencing an explosion of printed matter for which no adequate preparations were made by those concerned. My own profession more perhaps than any other has been overtaken by these events. The demand for librarians when I entered university was so negligible that nobody thought of it as a possible career. The training facilities were meagre, little thought had been given to what sort of training was required, and the result as time went on was a widening gap between supply and demand, both in actual numbers and in professional competence.

Marshall McLuhan may be right: typographic man may have run his course; and today, 500 years after the invention of printing, we may be entering a new Electronic Age;[2] but as a university audience knows only too well the printed book is still with us and still increasing in numbers. In Britain alone last year over 30,000 new titles appeared, running into hundreds of millions of copies and thousands of millions of pages. That figure covers books alone. Add periodicals, newspapers, reports, photostats, and all the various micro-copies; add also all the other forms of document which modern man uses to record his wit, wisdom, observations, and discoveries, and you have a mass of material which is in danger of submerging the human race, or at any rate those members of it whom fortune has made literate.

It is the fate of librarians to attempt to prevent this ultimate disaster. It is our function to bring order into the world of documentation, to select from the flood material needed for specific purposes, to arrange what we select and to make it available. The task requires a strong head, a steady purpose, and many other things besides. It is a long cry from the days when a career in librarianship was thought suitable for ailing gentlemen too shy to face the facts of life.

To return to Miss Fegan and the Achimota course: Miss Fagan was a remarkable woman and if her words had been listened to the libraries of Ghana would be in a better plight today. In her

report on Library Needs in West Africa she had this to say:-

> "If the best use is to be made of the libraries [i.e the libraries she proposed should be established in the four British West African colonies], they must be in charge, or under surveillance, of a trained librarian. I was glad to find this view was shared by most responsible people whom I met."

She then went on:

> "The librarians should be Africans, both to ensure continuity of service and (because) I think a well qualified man should best serve his own people."[3]

It is clear that she envisaged the course which she began at Achimota in 1944 as developing into a professional course, but this was not to be. The authorities responsible, the British Colonial Office, began to get cold feet. When the continuation of the course was being discussed in 1945 they advised against it.

"The prospects of the establishment of further libraries," they pontificated, "in which librarians may be employed are, at the present time, remote."[4]

This was in 1945, how wrong they were was soon to be proved. Within three years they were desperately searching for librarians

to staff many new libraries brought into existence in Africa by the efforts of their own or the various colonial governments. These included a national public library service operated by the Gold Coast Library Board, two new university libraries at Legon and Ibadan respectively, municipal and regional services in Nigeria, and medical, agricultural, legal, and other special libraries in the various territories.

LIBRARY SCHOOLS FOR WEST AFRICA

For all these libraries the bottleneck of development — of establishment even — was staff. It was long before any but expatriates were available, and in a world that was increasingly library-conscious these were hard to find, difficult to attract, expensive, and even then often inadequate in intellectual quality and professional training. It was soon apparent even to a Secretary of State for the Colonies that if West Africa was to have libraries it must produce its own librarians. And so, to cut a long story short, by the aid of the Carnegie Corporation in Nigeria, and by the country's own efforts in Ghana, library schools were at last established around the same time, 1960/1961. In Nigeria the University of Ibadan set up an Institute of Librarianship[5] and in Ghana the Ghana Library Board founded the Ghana Library School.[6] The latter was later taken over by the University of Ghana and became the present Department of Library Studies. In October last year a second school was

announced for Nigeria, at Ahmadu Bello University, and this is now in operation.

At Ibadan the course was designed from the beginning as a postgraduate one, though exceptions were made in the first year or two for practising librarians of some maturity. By last year it had supplied Nigeria with over one hundred qualified librarians, the great majority of them graduates with the additional professional qualification of the Ibadan Diploma of Library Studies. The output today averages twenty a year and despite the Civil War this seems to be no more than meeting current demand.

Before looking at the situation in Ghana it is worth comparing the above with overseas figures. Britain each year produces more than 1100 qualified librarians of whom 400 are graduates.[7] This leaves Nigeria, which has approximately the same population, a long way to go to catch up. But Britain is of course of highly industrialised country and hardly a fair comparison. A better comparison would be New Zealand, which like Nigeria is dependent on primary products, and almost wholly agricultural. New Zealand, has a single National Library School, with an output slightly higher than Ibadan's, an average of 26 per annum, from a similar one year postgraduate diploma course.[8] But New Zealand's population is under three million and to provide a

relatively comparable library service Nigeria would need nearly twenty times as many, i.e. nearly 500 qualified librarians a year. On the same basis Ghana would need over twice as many as New Zealand, that is some 60 new librarians a year.

Obviously in both cases these figures can only be regarded as ultimate aims, when the two countries have achieved complete literacy. But they are not unreasonable aims, even within a purely agricultural economy and without significant industrial development.

Given the example of New Zealand, where library development began only ten years before West Africa's and of the Scandinavian countries with their similar development both of primary industries and of libraries, it is predictable that Ghana's libraries, along with other public services and communication media, must expand if the economy is to do likewise. As Ghana is well ahead of Nigeria in economic development, with a per capita income some four times as great, we can expect it to be relatively more advanced in library development also. In some respects this has been so. In public library service Ghana long ago developed a system which surpassed anything in Nigeria except that of the latter's Eastern Region, now unhappily put out of action by the civil war. But in recent years Ghana's library development has slowed down while Nigeria's has accelerated.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in professional education. Both countries began their own training schemes at the same time, in 1960/61. Between then and the end of last academic year, 1967/68, Nigeria has produced approximately one hundred,[9] and Ghana forty, professional librarians. It is not however the numerical difference which is significant so much as the extent and degree of education and training. The great majority of the Nigerians have a post-graduate professional qualification. This means that by the time they are accepted into the profession they have behind them at least three years of a university first degree course, plus a year's concentrated professional training. Those who have successfully completed both courses have demonstrated, if nothing else, that they possess considerable staying power. But they have naturally done a lot more than that. They have mixed for four years with the country's academic best, both teachers and fellow students, they have become acquainted with the literature of specific subjects to a degree not normally found outside the university, they have come to know by daily use a large library with experienced staff, fine collections, and effective modern services.

GHANA LIBRARY SCHOOL

Those who have qualified in Ghana form two groups: the first come from the Ghana Library School, and the second from

its successor, the Department of Library Studies for which I am speaking tonight. The former group numbers thirty, all of whom took the British Library Association first qualification, the Associateship or A.L.A. This Library Association course was geared to in-service training and provided a close acquaintance with the practical procedures and techniques of the profession. It was not a university course, its minimum entry standard was lower, and it could be completed in under two years. Any comparison between it and a postgraduate diploma course or a university first degree course is invidious. They are different kinds of courses intended for different purposes.

DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY STUDIES

The second group of Ghana professionals consists of the successful graduates of this University's bachelor course in Library Studies. They numbered ten and they have to their credit three years of a university first degree course. This comprised a mixed course of library studies and certain subjects from the B.A. General course leading to a B.A. General degree in Library Studies. It was phased out after the first year so that only those admitted that year completed the course. It has now been replaced by a two year post-graduate diploma course.

The net result of these various efforts in Ghana has been an average annual addition of five to the country's professional librarians, With the present intake of students it will be even less during the next year or so. This number, less than four a year, does not meet normal replacement and wastage, let alone allow for any development of the country's libraries.

THE FUTURE

The immediate prospect for the profession is as you can see, hardly a cheerful one. The old bottleneck, the lack of experienced staff — I say 'experienced' advisedly and not 'qualified' — is still with us. However, there are glimmers of light. Last year the Department of Library Studies was reduced to a single lecturer. This year two of the three vacant posts, a professorship and a senior lectureship, have been filled. A new building has just been completed and the department is now equipped to give professional training of a kind appropriate to the Ghanaian situation. During the discussion following my talk I hope there will be a chance for me to say something of other ways in which we hope to help the profession. Meanwhile I must confine myself to the existing diploma course.

Our diploma course, as already noted, is a post-graduate one, open only to university graduates with a good degree who

are judged to have the requisite qualities of mind, personality and temperament to make satisfactory librarians. It consists at present of two parts: the first covers one academic session, ending with five written examination papers. The second part requires the completion of a written bibliography or thesis and practical experience in an approved library. Successful completion of the two parts is rewarded by a Diploma of Library Studies, (Dip.L.S.).

This post-graduate diploma course is in line with current professional educational practice in other English-speaking parts of the world. The only differences are (a) that other such courses are normally of one year's duration only, and (b) that in America the award is not a diploma but a Master's degree.[10]

ENTRANCE TO THE LIBRARY PROFESSION

Until the last few years Ghana's librarians gained their professional qualifications through the Library Association (London), by a combination of in-service training, correspondence course, and usually a final period of full time work in a British library school such as Loughborough or the N.W. Polytechnic. Qualification in such ways is no longer possible. Full time study at a library school is required from the beginning and this means in effect that entry to the profession for Ghanaians must be through the University of Ghana diploma

course. I have already indicated the general nature of this and I want now to give you some idea of its detail.

SELECTION

First, selection, because it should be emphasised that the minimum requirement is only minimum. Not every graduate will make a librarian. Qualities of personality and temperament and character are important; so is the nature of the degree, and its standard. All this is assessed by reference to the applicant's record and by personal interview. The main requirements are intelligence, intellectual curiosity, good sense and judgement, interest in books, evidence of wide reading, and on the personal side integrity of character, sense of order, patience and determination. A knowledge of languages is always an asset. There is always a place in a West African university library, for instance, for someone with a good knowledge of Arabic or French. A scientific background is valuable because so much of a library's work lies with scientists and their literature, and because so few scientists are offering for our profession. A combination of science and the major languages of scientific and technical literature, for example Russian and German in addition to English, is invaluable.

THE SYLLABUS

The subjects covered in the syllabus are:

(1) Cataloguing and classification, involving the principles underlying the arrangement of books in libraries, their listing in author and shelf lists and other library catalogues, and the indexing of their contents. This is basic to all librarianship and takes up a large part of the year's work. Much of it is practical, but with the coming of the computer more attention has to be given to the theoretical basis. There is particular need in the profession for men of special mathematical and philosophical abilities to apply themselves in this area.

(2) Bibliography. This falls into two main divisions:-

(a) Reference work, learning to know and use the tools of a librarian's trade, bibliographies of special subjects, guides, handbooks, and the general reference works such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias and yearbooks. This goes with a training in what we call Assistance to Readers.

(b) Historical or Analytical Bibliography. This deals with the physical structure of books and other documents, the history of book production, printing, binding, illustrating, etc., the present state of these arts, and the application of such knowledge in literary criticism, detection of forgeries, preservation of books, and so on.

(3) History of libraries and librarianship

In any profession an understanding of the present lies in its past, in its historical development. It is with this in mind that we trace the history of libraries. Emphasis is given to the libraries of West Africa, to their historical and social background and to the development of librarianship in this part of the world. Related matters such as the book trade, publishing, bookselling, etc. are also dealt with to complete the picture.

(4) Administration.

Here an attempt is made to introduce students to the principles of administration, and in particular the planning of libraries, the essentials of their budgetting, organizational structure, problems of staffing, the development of library routines, public relations, communication or reporting, and so on.

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

Obviously a great deal is packed into one year, and even then many aspects of work in different types of library have to be omitted. But we are not aiming to turn out librarians fully competent to tackle any professional job in any individual library. This is impossible. Librarians, like medical practioners and lawyers and any other professionals, are made by practical experience and don't emerge fully fledged from

an academic course. All that the academic course does and can do is to prepare them for what lies ahead, to lay the theoretical basis so that they have some understanding of what it's all about, to see that they understand the guiding principles, and that they gain sufficient knowledge of its literature to enable them to use it whenever and wherever the need arises.

Above all we try to develop their judgement and critical intelligence, because the methods of librarianship are changing rapidly and the problems of today will not be the problems of tomorrow. Much of its traditional practice is in question, many of its basic assumptions need re-examination. And this applies particularly to West Africa. Libraries are social institutions and transplantation from one society to another needs special attention to the new environment. Which is one reason why Miss Fegan was so right in insisting that libraries in Africa need African librarians.

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3 Quoted in Evans, op. cit., 136

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6 Evans, op. cit., 159

7 G.B. Dept. of Education and Science. Library Advisory Councils of England and Wales. Report on the supply and training of librarians. H.M.S.O., 1968.

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10 Since this was written the Regulations for the Postgraduate Diploma Course have been revised to allow completion in one year, and a Certificate Course for non-professional grades has been introduced.